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ABSTRACT

This monograph reports on a study concerning client acceptance and rates of rehabilitation in vocational programs for individuals who are blind. In this study, a national survey of state agencies for the blind examined characteristics of different agencies and developed classification criteria to distinguish agencies into logical groups based on lines of authority, funding, and operating procedures. Administrative staff of agencies of all 50 states were surveyed for the 1989 fiscal year with a questionnaire which assessed: (1) whether a program had or did not have separate program administration and control over vocational rehabilitation services for people with blindness or severe visual impairments; (2) different types of programs containing some form of specialized administration of services for individuals who are blind; (3) relationships among linked agencies; and (4) special characteristics of "partially combined" agencies. A table presents responses to the eight questions of the agencies of all 50 states. Results indicated that 24 agencies had sufficient independence to be classified as having a "separate" administrative structure; agencies in 10 states had a "combined" agency structure; six states had a "partially combined" agency structure; and the remaining 10 states had a general approach to administration of services to persons who are blind. (Contains 11 references.) (DB)

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Monograph 1:

Defining Rehabilitation Agency Types

Relationships of Participant Selection and Cost Factors of Service Delivery Across Rehabilitation Agency Types

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Relationships of Participant Selection and Cost Factors of Service Delivery Across Rehabilitation Agency Types

Monograph I: Defining Rehabilitation Agency Types

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Introduction

A Brief History

More than half of the agencies in the state-federal system providing comprehensive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to individuals who are blind were established before 1930. Created as small programs with limited resources, many of these agencies concentrated on rehabilitation needs of individuals who are blind using state appropriated funds. At one time, there were more than 40 state agencies serving only individuals who are blind in the United States (Results Consultants, 1984). These early programs evolved, as landmark legislation beginning in 1943 with P.L. 78-113, which improved resources, employment opportunities, and planning for comprehensive rehabilitation services. For the first time, comprehensive VR services became available to people with vision disabilities. Currently, there are 81 VR programs in the state-federal system. Of those, there are 25 state agencies which provide services to people with vision disabilities under a separate state plan for persons who are blind. Together, these VR programs serve between 25,000 and 35,000 Americans with vision disabilities each year (Hill, 1989).

While providing the impetus for the extension of VR services to individuals who are blind, the emerging state-federal system also facilitated the development of new models of human service delivery designed to serve individuals with a variety of disability types. The passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) and its subsequent amendments formed the current structure for the delivery of VR services by state agencies to people who have vision disabilities (Moore, Maxson, & Huebner, in press). Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires states to develop a plan for VR services and to designate a unit within state government to provide these services to people with vision disabilities. Depending on the state, a person who is blind may receive VR services in a specialized agency setting for blindness, a general setting in a nonspecialized agency, or a combined setting with some agency components specialized for blindness rehabilitation (Kirchner, 1982). In addition, some states have agency components specialized for blindness, with VR counseling services placed outside the blindness components.

Specialized vs. Nonspecialized Services

The different approaches to rehabilitation service delivery have led to a long standing debate about the agency structure with the greatest cost-benefits of services to people who are blind. Advocates of separately administered services point to the degree of specialization needed to address rehabilitation needs of people with vision disabilities such as orientation and mobility (Hill & Ponder,

1976); rehabilitation teaching (Leja, 1990); low vision services; and computer access technology (Goodrich, 1984). Administrators must be familiar with the specific rehabilitation needs of people who are blind, and the agency must be structured to advocate for and devote resources to meet their needs. In part, this view reflects the awareness that vision disabilities are a low incidence disability requiring unique services, and that agencies with combined or general type structures may shift services from people with visual disabilities to people with nonvisual disabilities. This shift is thought to occur because the knowledge required for specialization in blindness is costly. However, nonvisual disabilities have higher incidence rates and require shorter periods of rehabilitation often resulting in a higher rate of successful case closure and less funding expenditures per case. Advocates of general or combined agencies point to the substantial overlap of services provided by separate VR programs. The overlap is primarily contained in the *administration* of service providers, and not in the services provided.

The J.W.K. Study

In the most comprehensive study of the organizational structure of agencies serving people who are blind, J.W.K. (1981) found no differences between types of agencies and case closures though a trend was identified: General type agencies had lower average costs than combined or separate type agencies. However, the differences in average costs were greater *within* agency types than they were *across* agency types. In a re-analysis and extension of the original J.W.K. study, Kirchner (1982) reported that no discernable pattern could be identified for outcomes and costs.

One problem identified by Kirchner (1982) was the heterogeneity of agencies. The J.W.K. Corporation classified agencies on the basis of 12 defining characteristics or variables. Cluster analysis was used to place agencies into three different groups. Data on case closure and case costs were obtained from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and compared across agency types.

Kirchner (1982) believed that the original J.W.K. study (1981) incorrectly grouped agencies and inadvertantly masked or minimized significant organizational characteristics of agencies. In her analysis, she expected that the criteria used to define agency structure would result in agencies grouped together that had the same value on those criteria. This was not the case. Instead, the J.W.K. study grouped agencies that did not share criteria. Kirchner concluded that the classification strategy used by J.W.K. may have misclassified some of the states into groups possessing different organizational structures.

An Alternative Approach

An alternative approach is to group agencies with similar organizational components to administer service delivery. The purpose of the present study is to develop guidelines to define and categorize the administrative structures of agencies serving individuals who are blind and, in a second study, to link the groupings of agencies to measures of cost-effectiveness and status outcomes of clients who have obtained services from these agencies. The components that define a service organization include the autonomy and interrelationships of an agency within a state government, control of the agency budget, and specific lines of personnel authority within the agency. Defining key components which characterize an agency would allow agencies to be grouped according to similar characteristics among those organizational structure variables. These redefined classifications could then be used to explore relationships of agency types with measures of case costs and client outcome statuses as analyzed by the J.W.K. Corporation.

Defining the Organizational Structure: The J.W.K. Approach

Although the J.W.K. Corporation used a statistical procedure to determine their categories of agency types, the underlying structure of the agencies was determined from 12 questions about funding and line of authority. After reviewing these 12 questions, Kirchner (1982) determined that the J.W.K. classifications were not internally consistent. However, when viewed in general terms, a number of organizational similarities could be described for agencies within each type. J.W.K. (1981) and Kirchner (1982) described three types of agencies which provide VR services and classified them according to their degree of specialization of service delivery, mission, and administrative line of authority. The three types were the specialized agency or type "C", the combined agency or type "B", and the generalized agency or type "A".

The first type of agency, the specialized or type "C", is the most homogenous of the different approaches to organizing VR services for persons who are blind (J.W.K., 1981). The separate program model as described by J.W.K. applied to one third of the state programs having a mission of service only to persons with vision disabilities. Other highly reported characteristics were that the separate agency was led by an administrator with direct line authority over constituent programs and personnel, possessed a specified budget, had primary authority to request federal funds and services mandated within a state plan which specifically referred to people who are blind.

The organizational structure most different from that of specialization is the general agency or type "A" (J.W.K., 1981). The general agency serves individuals with vision disabilities. However, its primary organizational mission is to serve

individuals with all disabilities, and in some cases, also individuals who are dependents such as children, or individuals who have economic or cultural disadvantages. When budgetary activities occur, the general agency allocates resources for all targeted constituents. The resource needs of people who are blind are reviewed along with people with other types of disabilities.

The third organizational structure is the mixed or combined agency labeled type "B" in which two or more human service agencies are integrated with one another. The extent of integration is not complete, so that some administrative functions of the constituent agencies are controlled by an office in one agency or the other, or in some states, at another organizational level or office (J.W.K., 1981). The combined agency has a more narrow mission focus than that of the general agency, with many of the programs of the constituent agencies in tact, though program supervision and/or budget justification are often performed by personnel not in the specific program.

Regardless of the agency type, all VR programs are required to identify and establish procedures to accept program participants, develop Individualized Written Rehabilitation Programs (IWRPs), provide services to those accepted into the program, and terminate services.

Rehabilitation Services and Outcomes

Once potential clients are referred or identified by the agency, a number of activities are initiated. The first step involves acceptance into the program. Acceptance is not automatic, and individuals can be rejected for services after an evaluation from status 02 or after extended diagnosis and evaluation from status 06. In some states, a determination of the client's employability is needed before the client can be accepted for services by the agency. After acceptance into the program, appropriate training and services are initiated. Depending on client needs and program availability, some of the services provided are counseling and guidance, physical restoration (including eye glasses and other visual services), transportation, placement, referral to other programs, income maintenance, adjustment training, vocational training, college training, and on-the-job training. Service delivery can last months or years.

Successful closures or status 26 closures are defined as *individuals suitably employed for a minimum of 60 days after services are terminated* (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1990). Hill (1989) found that approximately half of all participants who are blind in the state-federal VR system with successful closures in 1982 entered competitive employment at the conclusion of their training. The successful closures included individuals who became homemakers, unpaid family workers, or employees of industries for the blind.

Unsuccessful closures are participants who are unemployed or who did not remain employed for 60 days after completing their programs. Individuals who remain unemployed after receiving services are closed as status 28, and individuals who are unemployed after an IWRP is completed but dropped out of the program before services were initiated are closed as status 30.

Critics of the VR process identify several points in the rehabilitation sequence where biases may occur (Management Services Associates, 1975; Scott, 1969). These include selective recruiting and program acceptance that bring participants with better employment prospects into the system over individuals with lower employment prospects, and successful closures that emphasize homemaker and employment in industries for the blind instead of competitive employment. These selection biases would lower case costs and time needed for rehabilitation.

Examining the sequence of steps in the rehabilitation process suggests several methods for determining whether agency types vary in their rates of selection of participants. If the severity of vision disability indicates that extensive services are necessary for rehabilitation, one possibility is to accept individuals with less severe vision disabilities. Another question is whether successful or unsuccessful closures occur more frequently by agency type and whether agencies differ in their ratios of competitive employment closures to homemaker and industries for the blind closures.

In order to examine issues concerning client acceptance and rates of rehabilitation in vocational programs for individuals who are blind, two studies were conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision. In the first study, a national survey of state agencies for the blind was conducted to examine factors that define the characteristics of different agencies; similar programs were grouped together. In a second study, to be published separately, the groupings of agency characteristics were related to (a) actual rates of program acceptance, (b) types of rehabilitation outcomes, (c) costs of rehabilitation, and (d) time spent in the VR program. Both studies focused on clients with vision disabilities receiving services from a state VR agency.

Study I:
A Classification of State Agencies Serving People who are Blind or Vision Disabled

The purpose of the study is to develop classification criteria to distinguish agencies into logical groups based on line of authority, funding, and operating procedures. The main research question was

> *What are the categories of administrative structure currently used by human service organizations which provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or have vision disabilities?*

Method

Subjects

Subjects were administrative staff of agencies of all 50 states belonging to the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). These agencies are the primary providers of comprehensive VR services to people with vision disabilities within their states.

Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire was developed in two phases. First, topical statements and questions about line authority, funding, and operating procedures of agencies serving individuals who are blind were obtained from a panel of administrators, practitioners, and consumers. Second, these statements and questions were refined and ordered in terms of importance. The refinement process resulted in eight primary questions which were then evaluated by the research committee of NCSAB for thoroughness and ease of completion.

In February, 1991, the RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision sponsored a National Research Learning Forum in Memphis, TN to bring together researchers, agency administrators, direct service providers, and consumers to participate in a series of three focus groups and presentations concerning VR for persons who are blind or have vision disabilities. The discussion topics were (a) Independent Living and Rehabilitation Teaching, (b) Orientation and Mobility Skills, and (c) Administration of Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. Participants were asked to identify critical questions which define administrative structure for inclusion in a national survey. The administrative structure focus group consisted of 14 participants, representing past and present administrators of programs for

persons who are blind or severely visually impaired. Approximately one half of the focus group participants were employed in public rehabilitation programs, and the remainder were employed in private not-for-profit rehabilitation programs.

The administrative focus group overviewed 14 classification questions used by J.W.K. (1981) to categorize state agencies for the blind. The two main issues of the J.W.K. classification also dominated the focus group discussion: (a) specifying the line(s) of authority of an agency and (b) delineating an agency's budget and funding justification procedures. At the conclusion of the focus group, eight critical questions were generated that define the structure of an agency serving people who are blind (Table 1). The first two questions assess whether a program has separate program administration and control over VR services or no separable program administration for persons who are blind or severely visually impaired. Negative responses to these two questions would initially classify an agency as ***general.*** Affirmative responses would indicate a program with some form of ***specialized*** administration of services for individuals who are blind. Questions 3 and 4 distinguish different types of programs containing some form of specialized administration of services for individuals who are blind (e.g., separate governing board overseeing its operations, identifiable budget and spending authority). Negative answers to questions 3 and 4 indicate services for people who are blind are provided in an agency linked or ***combined*** with another human services agency.

Questions 5 and 6 further delineate the relationships between linked agencies by identifying the individual to whom the agency administrator reports. If the agency administrator reports directly to the governor or to a cabinet-level secretary, the agency represented must have substantial autonomy within state government indicating either a separate or general type agency. If the agency administrator reports instead to the administrator of another agency, services for individuals who are blind are provided within a combined agency in which program services form a division or section of a larger agency. The seventh question assesses a particular type of combined agency in which the agency administrator has full line authority over some agency personnel, but VR case management is supervised by personnel outside the division or section providing services for individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired. This "partially combined" agency appears to be a recent development in the management of human service agencies. The last question was designed to verify whether an agency operates as a separate agency or as one of the combined type agencies. An affirmative response represents a separate agency providing services to individuals who are blind. Agencies with separate state plans tend to have far more autonomy.

Table 1:
Criterion Questions Concerning Line of Authority and Funding to Define Agency Type[1]

1. Does your agency have a separate program administrator for services to persons who are blind or visually impaired?

2. Does the separate program administrator for the blind or visually impaired program have direct line authority over vocational rehabilitation management?

3. Does your agency serving persons who are blind or visually impaired have a separate governing board?[2]

4. Does your agency serving persons who are blind or visually impaired have a separate identifiable budget and spending authority?

5. Does the administrator of the agency serving persons who are blind or visually impaired report directly to the governor or a cabinet-level secretary (or similar title)?

6. Does the administrator of the agency serving persons who are blind or visually impaired report to the director of vocational rehabilitation, education, or other human services unit?

7. Does the administrator of the agency serving persons who are blind or visually impaired have direct line authority over all services except vocational rehabilitation case management?

8. Does your agency have a separate state plan for provision of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired?

[1] Survey respondents were asked to answer the eight questions for the 1989 fiscal year. Changes in administrative structure for earlier years were documented in an open-ended ninth survey question in which respondents indicated whether any changes had occurred in agency characteristics beginning with the 1989 fiscal year.

[2] A separate governing board is defined here as a board which oversees budget and policy for the agency and there is no other higher board.

The completed survey was sent to the NCSAB research committee for review and evaluation. The committee reviewed the questions for appropriateness, clarity of language, and completeness, and suggested several changes which were incorporated into the survey instrument.

Survey of State Agencies for the Blind

The questionnaire was mailed to the director of the state agency as identified by the NCSAB. A 100% response rate was achieved with one follow-up mailing and one telephone reminder.

Data Tabulation

Questionnaire responses were tabulated, and a classification of state agencies was initiated. The classification distinguished agencies with a general approach to administration from agencies with some form of specialized administration of services for people who are blind.

Results

Questionnaire responses for state agencies are shown in Table 2. Following Kirchner's (1982) re-analysis of the consistency of agency characteristics, the number of agencies with total agreements of characteristics were tallied, especially in regard to key questions designed to identify an agency type. In this study, separate agencies were the most similar with 23 of 24 agencies showing 100% agreement on four critical questions that assessed agency administrator status, presence of a state plan, budget authority, and reporting to a cabinet-level secretary or to the governor. Agreements were also found for the combined agencies, showing 100% agreements for 8 of the 10 agencies on four critical questions for combined agency definition, including a 100% response rate by all 10 agencies to the key question on reporting to the head of another agency. Partially combined agencies also had a 100% response rate to the key question concerning case management supervision. The general agencies were the most variable, showing 50% to 80% agreements on key questions used to assess general agencies. However, all general agencies were also identified by 100% negative responses to the key question on whether the agency has a separate state plan for the provision of services to persons who are blind. The categorization of agencies based on their self-reported characteristics appear consistent within each agency type.

Table 2:
Survey Responses by State Agencies for the Blind

Survey Questions	ALABAMA	ALASKA	ARIZONA	ARKANSAS	CALIFORNIA	COLORADO	CONNECTICUT	DELAWARE	FLORIDA	GEORGIA	HAWAII	IDAHO	ILLINOIS	INDIANA	IOWA	KANSAS	KENTUCKY	LOUISIANA
1. Agency has program administrator for services to persons who are blind or visually impaired	▮			▮			▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮
2. Separate program administrator has DLA over vocational rehabilitation management	▮			▮			▮		▮			▮	▮		▮		▮	
3. Agency for the blind has separate governing board				▮			▮					▮	▮		▮			
4. Agency for the blind has a separate budget and spending authority	▮	▮	▮	▮			▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	
5. Administrator reports directly to governor/cabinet-level secretary							▮	▮					▮		▮		▮	
6. Administrator reports to director of vocational rehabilitation, education, or human services unit	▮	▮	▮							▮	▮		▮	▮		▮		▮
7. Administrator has DLA over all services <u>except vocational rehabilitation case management</u>		▮									▮			▮		▮	▮	
8. Agency has separate state plan for provision of services to persons who are blind				▮			▮	▮	▮			▮			▮		▮	

Table 2: Continued

Survey Questions	MAINE	MARYLAND	MASSACHUSETTS	MICHIGAN	MINNESOTA	MISSISSIPPI	MISSOURI	MONTANA	NEBRASKA	NEVADA	NEW HAMPSHIRE	NEW JERSEY	NEW MEXICO	NEW YORK	NORTH CAROLINA	NORTH DAKOTA	OHIO	OKLAHOMA
1. Agency has program administrator for services to persons who are blind or visually impaired	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮
2. Separate program administrator has DLA over vocational rehabilitation management	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	
3. Agency for the blind has separate governing board				▮							▮		▮					
4. Agency for the blind has a separate budget and spending authority	▮		▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	
5. Administrator reports directly to governor/cabinet-level secretary			▮		▮			▮	▮				▮	▮	▮			
6. Administrator reports to director of vocational rehabilitation, education, or human services unit	▮	▮				▮	▮			▮	▮	▮				▮	▮	▮
7. Administrator has DLA over all services except vocational rehabilitation case management		▮						▮		▮					▮			▮
8. Agency has separate state plan for provision of services to persons who are blind			▮	▮	▮		▮		▮			▮	▮	▮	▮			

Table 2: Continued															
Survey Questions	OREGON	PENNSYLVANIA	RHODE ISLAND	SOUTH CAROLINA	SOUTH DAKOTA	TENNESSEE	TEXAS	UTAH	VERMONT	VIRGINIA	WASHINGTON	WEST VIRGINIA	WISCONSIN	WYOMING
1. Agency has program administrator for services to persons who are blind or visually impaired	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	
2. Separate program administrator has DLA over vocational rehabilitation management	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮			
3. Agency for the blind has separate governing board	▮			▮			▮	▮			▮			▮
4. Agency for the blind has a separate budget and spending authority	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮			▮
5. Administrator reports directly to governor/cabinet-level secretary	▮				▮		▮			▮	▮			▮
6. Administrator reports to director of vocational rehabilitation, education, or human services unit		▮	▮		▮	▮		▮	▮			▮		
7. Administrator has DLA over all services <u>except vocational rehabilitation case management</u>			▮			▮								
8. Agency has separate state plan for provision of services to persons who are blind	▮	▮		▮	▮		▮		▮	▮	▮			

The classification of agency administration types show 24 agencies with sufficient independence with regard to line of authority and delineation of budget from their state governments, and can be classified as having a "separate" administrative structure. A total of 10 states had a "combined" agency structure, showing significant links to a department of VR or other human services agencies. An additional six agencies had stronger links to their "combined" agencies in which VR case management was supervised by the linked agency or within the next layer of agency administration. These six agencies were classified as having a "partially combined" administrative structure. The remaining 10 agencies had a general approach to administration of services to persons who are blind. The classification of agencies is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3:
Classification of State Agencies for the Blind: Survey Responses for Administrative Autonomy and Control of Direct Service Resources for FY 1989

Separate	Combined	Partially Combined	General
Arkansas	Alabama	Colorado	Alaska
Connecticut	Arizona	Hawaii	California
Delaware	Maine	Indiana	Georgia
Florida	Missouri	Kansas	Illinois
Idaho	Nevada	Tennessee	Louisiana
Iowa	New Hampshire	Wisconsin	Maryland
Kentucky	Ohio		Montana
Massachusetts	Oklahoma		North Dakota
Michigan	Rhode Island		West Virginia
Minnesota	South Dakota		Wyoming
Mississippi	Utah		
Nebraska			
New Jersey			
New Mexico			
New York			
North Carolina			
Oregon			
Pennsylvania			
South Carolina			
South Dakota			
Texas			
Vermont			
Virginia			
Washington			

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